



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

AUG 31 2015

[As amended by Memorandum dated July 2, 2025]

Policy Memorandum 15-02

To: All Employees
From: Director *Jonathan Jarvis*
Subject: Employee and Volunteer Participation in Filming

Background

Our national parks continue to be popular locations for filming, including feature films, documentaries, television programs, and advertisements. Often the parks themselves are simply the setting for these productions.

Occasionally, superintendents receive requests to interview National Park Service (NPS) employees or volunteers on camera as subject matter experts in a wide range of disciplines or to film employees or volunteers conducting tours, demonstrations or field work. This type of filming may advance NPS goals and individual park missions, and may help convey to the public the stories or messages we are trying to tell. Authorizing on-camera involvement by NPS employees and volunteers in filming requires a very clear understanding and documentation of how our participation would advance NPS goals and individual park missions.

Policy

The strategic use of film, still photography and audio recording can be a powerful tool, but it also has the potential to have a considerable negative impact on our bureau's reputation and credibility if not handled well or with forethought; therefore, the NPS will NOT allow NPS employees and volunteers on duty to participate in filming or audio recording where they are followed by individuals or crews for extended periods of time. This policy applies no matter the size of the crew, the amount or type of equipment used, or any other aspects of the activity that may reflect new or emerging technologies or platforms. Allowing employees or volunteers to appear on camera or be recorded in these situations results in footage and recordings that production companies can then edit for later broadcast. These broadcasts are frequently labeled "reality TV," or "factual entertainment," or "observational documentary," and involve documenting the daily lives of individuals rather than concentrating on the stories or mission of the NPS.

Park employees and volunteers should NOT sign model releases, location releases, or any other legal document provided by film, still photography, or audio recording production companies. These documents tend to be very legally dense, irrevocable, and written in a way that favors the

production company, sometimes to the point of limiting liability and authorizing specific activities. In addition, these documents generally allow for the unlimited future use of footage and images by the production company for any purpose, including reuse, editing, and resale. If a permit for the filming, still photography, or audio recording activity is required under Federal law, the terms of use of the finished product must be addressed in the special park use permit using standard model and location terms and conditions. If discussions with the production company over terms of use become contentious, please consult with your regional or field solicitor's office for guidance.

This Policy Memorandum does not address filming, still photography, or audio recording in park areas except as it relates to NPS decision-making about employees and volunteers appearing on camera or being recorded, as described in this policy. Those decisions are made by superintendents in compliance with policy addressing employee and volunteer participation in filming and audio recording productions. Communications staff in parks, regions, and headquarters are responsible for understanding that policy and providing guidance about compliance. The management of all filming, still photography, and audio recording is governed by applicable Federal law. This includes decisions made by the NPS to require permits and fees for filming, still photography, or audio recording and decisions to approve or deny permit requests. Those decisions are made by superintendents in compliance with policy addressing special use permits. Special park uses staff in parks, regions, and headquarters are responsible for understanding that policy and providing guidance about compliance and the application of Federal law to all permitting decisions for filming, still photography, and audio recording productions. Nothing in this Policy Memorandum should be interpreted to conflict with Federal law applicable to filming, still photography, and audio recording in park areas.

Managers must also adhere to applicable policy dealing with the use of uncrewed aircraft in the parks, including their use for filming.

If you have any questions or comments about this Policy Memorandum, please contact the NPS Office of Special Park Uses at 202-513-7092 or at WASO_SPU_Permits @nps.gov.

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